



Starting a Business in Somerville

Economic Development provides a quick guide through the basic steps that you need to take to start a business in Somerville.

Locations: The first step is to locate space in which to operate a business. Somerville has a diverse mix of Commercial and Industrial business areas, which should meet a variety of needs. The Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development (OSPCD) maintains a listing of the commercial and industrial space that is currently available for lease or sale. Please visit OSPCD or call 617 625 6600 ext. 2500.

Zoning: Once you have located the space that meets your needs, make sure that your venture is an allowed use in the zoning district where your space is located. The Inspectional Services Division (ISD) or the Planning Division at OSPCD can help you determine this. For more information, see Planning and Zoning on the left. Both ISD and the Planning Department will help you address the questions related to your use, such as allowable number of stories and square footage parking requirements, setbacks, landscaping, etc.

Depending on your use and the zoning district, you may need to obtain a special permit or a variance prior to commencing work on your space. For a typical, average sized project, the planning review and permitting process may take from two to six months.

Building Code: If your plans include remodeling or building out space you should also speak to ISD, so we can guide you or your contractor through the local and state building code requirements. Once your space is prepared you will be able to apply for a Certificate of Occupancy. You may need to obtain a special permit or variance prior to commencing work on your space as well. For a typical, average sized project, the planning review and permitting process may take from two to six months.

Financing: City of Somerville offers micro lending through a relationship with ACCION. Additional financing may be available through the US Small Business Association and the Center for Women and Enterprise. For more information, contact Economic Development at 93 Highland Ave, Somerville, 617-625-6600 extension 2500, or on the website at www.somervillema.gov.

Food Services: Businesses involving food are required to comply with State Sanitary Code. The Somerville Board of Health will help ensure that your plans comply with the Code. Food operations will also require a Common Victualler's license from the Licensing Commission. The Licensing Commission is also responsible for the transfer of liquor licenses and beer & wine licenses.

Once you have received all of your approvals, visit the City Clerk's Office at City Hall and apply for a Business Certificate. Please make yourself familiar with all the necessary State and Federal procedures that are also required with opening and operating a business. For information on what local regulations must be met to start a new business, see the link on the right under Regulations.